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The Jewish Quarterly Review.

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FOUR OF THE OLDEST EPITAPHS AFTER THE RESETTLEMENT OF THE JEWS IN ENGLAND.

IN the cemetery that lies at the back of the Beth Cholim, the Jewish community of London preserves the graves of the men and women who originally founded it. The tombstones cover those in whom English Judaism has to recognise the corner-stones of its restoration. The task of science is to charm up the picture of those days in which a handful of faithful men, by constancy and confidence in God, compassed the glory of causing the light of Judaism, which they had borne safely over a sea of trouble, unextinguished by the storms of persecution or by the blasts of the Inquisition, to shine again on the friendly shores of England after an interval of many hundred years. When, however, the student of history—the custodian of the cemetery of the past—standing in the still precincts of the Beth Cholim, would fain ask of those heroes of faith what stone-cut messages their contemporaries delivered to posterity about them, then the historian finds for the most part only sunken graves and defaced inscriptions. History speaks, but the stones are silent.

It, therefore, came as a pleasing surprise to me when, far from London, I discovered the epitaphs of four of the chief members of the London Jewish community. Through one of those accidents on which the fortune of historical science depends, a small 4to. MS. page in the Leipsic Rathsbibliothek (B.H. 18) preserves a copy of these very London inscriptions. Johann Christophorus Wagenseil, whose collections and Hebrew papers are contained in that codex, must be credited with the honour of causing these copies to be made. When the pious Christian Professor of Altorf, untirably energetic in the service of Jewish literature, conceived the plan of working at Jewish epitaphs and laying them before the learned world, he took advantage of his wide acquaintance with scientific

men to obtain copies of Jewish inscriptions in different lands. Such men as Magliabechi, of Florence, strove zealously to enrich the collection of the Polyhistor of Altorf. It was in 1682 that the harvest of the Italian churchyards was gathered in at Altorf. It may well have been at the same date that the Professor of Hebrew in Upsala, Gustav Peringer de Lilienblad, whom Charles XI. of Sweden afterwards sent to the Karaites, kindly copied for the use of his German friend four of the most important of the London epitaphs. We know from Wagenseil himself ("Benachrichtigungen," Leipzig, 1705, p. 31), the cordial relations that subsisted between the two scholars. At the end of the transcript appears the following note in Wagenseil's hand:—

Inscriptiones Londinenses communicatæ a Cl[arissimo] Peringero.

In keeping with the general character of the learned studies of the age, Wagenseil was moved to collect Hebrew epitaphs in the interest, not of history, but of philology. He was quite indifferent to dates and names, which are the chief interest of modern research into these subjects; his sole concern was with the Hebrew lines in praise of the dead, the turns of expression, the verses, and the rhymes. Hence it follows, what seems to us a piece of naïve simplicity, that the names and dates are dismissed with a mere "etc." That, notwithstanding this omission, I am able to add the necessary particulars, I owe to the readiness of Mr. Lucien Wolf, who has supplied the dates from the death-register of the Portuguese congregation in London. Peringer himself gave the name only in the first epitaph; in the other three cases I have supplied the names and have placed them in brackets.

All four inscriptions are composed in metrical form. Like a breath from the good old Spanish time when a new spring-tide of Hebrew song blossomed on Andalusian soil, there hovers over the epitaphs of the Portuguese Jews, even in exile, a spirit fragrant with poetic beauty and ancient rhyme. The exigencies of metrical form explain all seeming anomalies. On this ground, and in order to lend a helping hand, I have added an occasional vowel-point; in the original there is no attempt at punctuation.

I.

Londinensis.

In Sepulcrum Josua di Silva, Rabbini.
[Carrera III., 30; 17 Iyar 5439.]

Metre: - - - | - ֿ - - - | - ֿ - - -

שִׁמְשׁ בִּנְבֻעוֹן דּוֹם וְגַם יֵרֵחַ
בִּי נֶאֱסַף זֶה דָּר [זֶהר] מֵאוֹרוֹתִים
לְבִישׁוֹ מַעִיל קִדְרוֹת בַּעוֹר זֹורֵחַ
שִׁמְשׁ יֵהוּשָׁע בְּרוֹם שָׁמַיִם

Stand still O sun, as once before in Gibeon, and thou too O moon ;
In me is extinguished the brightness of the two lights,
They clothe themselves as in a robe of darkness,
While the sun of Joshua still shines in heaven above.

In these distichs, the fullest expression is given to the respect in which the famous and learned Chacham of the Portuguese congregation in London was held by his contemporaries. As at Gibeon the victorious hero had caused the heavenly lights to stay in their courses, so Joshua di Silva had done the like in his death. (The word וָדָד is to me incomprehensible. I regard it as an error of the copyist for זָדָר.)

II.

[Abraham Israel de Sequeira. Carrera III., 31 ; 21 Kislev 5439.]

מצבת

קבורת איש חי רב פעלים זקן ונשוא
פנים תם וישר ירא אלהים הנכבד
אברהם ישראל דסיקרא נפטר שנת וכו'
Metre: (-) - - | - - - - | - - - -

איש חי אשר יבטח בתבל הבל
יזכר מעונתו בבוא עתו
רמה ותולעה ותבל הבל
יראה בעין שכלו תמורתו

The Tombstone

of an active man, rich in deeds, old and respected, blameless, upright and God-fearing, the honoured Abraham Israel di Sequeira, who died in the year, etc.

A man who in his life trusts in this world,
In vain will remember that home when his time comes ;
But maggot and worm and a world of nothingness,
He will see in its stead with his spiritual eye.

Abraham Israel de Sequeira, by whose side Joshua di Silva was buried, was one of the oldest and most respected members of the community. He was one of the elders who aided in acquiring the cemetery for the newly-settled congregation. His name appears in the purchase-deed of the burial ground in which he was placed for his eternal rest (I. Davis in the *Jewish Chronicle*, November 26, 1880). His will, according to Mr. Lucien Wolf's communication, was proved in December, 1678. The esteem in which he was held may be learnt from the titles which precede his name on the tomb. His epitaph has no individual colour, but is rather an epigram expressing a general thought. The rhyme is based on the Portuguese pronunciation of the Hebrew.

III.

[Rahel Gomes Serra Carrera III. ; 4 Heshvan 5439.]

מצבת

קבורת רחל בת הגביר יעקב גומיץ סירא
 ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה ויבכו אותה אביה ואמה
 ויקוננו עליה בקול מר וקרא זה אל זה ואמר

Metre : - - - | - ˘ - - - | - ˘ - - -

איכה מנורת זיו וציץ פורחת
 איכה צבית חן יפת עינים
 היתה מנת עפר חמה זורחת
 אך נפשה עלתה לרום שמים

Tombstone

of Rachel, daughter of Jacob Gomes Serra. When her soul left her and she died, her father and her mother bewailed her and mourned over her with voice of grief and each cried to the other :

How has the shining light, the blooming flower,
 How has the graceful gazelle with beauteous eyes,
 How has the shining sun become a clod of earth.
 ———But her soul went up to the heights of heaven.

In the third line *חמה* is used as an iambus against the grammar.

IV.

[Abraham Fernandez Caravajal ; 24 Heshvan 5420.]

Metre : - - - ˘ | - - - - -

עדה המצבה ועד הגל
 על איש קבור בזה נשוא פנים
 מעלות מדות טובות אשר סגל
 לפני עליון בעדו יהו עונים
 ביתו פתוח הוא ליד מעגל
 להיות חונן רלים ואביונים
 נשא גם נתן באמת רגל
 על פיו ודבריו נמצאו כנים
 אברהם חזקיה וקארווא(נ)גל
 הוא זה זכור לטוב ברוך בנים
 יום כ"ז מרחשון שלחו מגל
 בקציר חייו כי בשלו שנים
 בשנת ת"ך עינו כהתה ויגל
 עיני נפשו לראות במערנים

The stone is witness, as also the heap
To the honoured man who is buried here.
The good qualities which he made his own
Will speak for him before the Most High.
An open house he kept by the way,
For he was generous to the needy and the poor.
His doings and his dealings with men were truth,
Truth was familiar in his mouth, his words ever pure.
Abraham Chizkiah Caravajal,
His memory is honoured, blessed with children.
On Heshvan 26 he was mown down
In a ripe old age, for his years were full.
In the year 420 his eye was dim,
And the eye of his soul rejoiced to see realms of bliss.

Thus has been preserved for us the memorial-stone that was intended to hand down the admiration and honour in which the great man who helped to found the London congregation was held. His virtues were too prominently in all mouths for it to be necessary to dilate upon them in his epitaph. But two of his virtues were especially insisted upon—his princely liberality and his unqualified honesty as a merchant. By these means he convinced Cromwell that a free State like England could derive nothing but advantage from granting rights of residence to men of his stamp, even although they were Jews. We learn from the terms of the epitaph that the reaper Death mowed down a ripe life, for Caravajal was an old man when he was called away. He must, indeed, have been already in the prime of his life when he reached England. (Lucien Wolf, "Resettlement of the Jews in England," p. 4.) He, Abraham Israel di Sequera, and some others, were the most conspicuous figures among the founders of the London community, and Caravajal also exerted himself energetically towards the purchase of the cemetery. It was thus a just chance that preserved his epitaph at a time when his tombstone still stood erect, and announced in clear fashion the character of the man who lay beneath.

The inscriptions collected by Wagenseil were arranged in October, 1730, by George Jacob Kehr, of Schleusingen, Professor of Oriental languages in the University of Leipsic. He also added an index at the head of the folio volume in which he had the papers bound. Delitzsch, in his Catalogue of the Leipsic Library, has already condemned the work of the industrious compiler. The London epitaphs, which appear as the fifteenth item in the volume, he arranges as follows:—

15. *Londinenses Anglicanæ in sepulcris :*
 1. Josuæ Silva, Rabbini Londinensis ;
 2. Abrahami Israelis di Sikira ;
 3. Rahelis, filiæ Jacobi Gomitz Sira ;
 4. Abraham Hiskia, anno 1660.

Thus Caravajal's tomb was again defaced. The ך which, for the sake of the metre, was prefixed to the family name in the inscription, prevented Kehr from recognising who was meant. A mere glance at the prevailing rhyme ך, would have led to the correction of Peringer's error. The date of the death which appears in the epitaph, and which exactly agrees with that given in the London register, added to the contents of the verses themselves, which unroll a characteristic picture of the man, leave no atom of doubt that in the inscription on the tomb of Abraham Chiskiah Caravajal we possess the epitaph of the man who bore in Anglo-Jewish history the proud name of Antonio Fernandez de Caravajal.

APPENDIX.

As I thought it likely that there might be some yet unpublished manuscript notices about Peringer in the Archives of the Royal Record Office at Stockholm, I applied to the Director, Mr. C. T. Ohner, on the subject. I am indebted to that gentleman for the following biographical details about the man whom Zunz thought worthy of mention in his book "*Zur Geschichte und Litteratur der Juden*" (Abschnitt I).

"G. Peringer, born in Sweden in 1651, devoted himself with success to oriental studies while still a student at Upsala. Through the publication of a treatise '*De Messia Judaico a Rabbiorum maxime Commentariis*' (Holmiæ, 1675) he became in a position to start upon a lengthy journey in the prosecution of his work. He visited Kiel, Hamburg, Jena, Oxford, Cambridge and Paris. He was about to accompany the Syrian Archbishop Timotheus to the East, when his intention was put a stop to by illness. After his recovery he went to Rome and then to Venice, and finally studied at Altdorf under the celebrated scholar Wagenseil. It was there that he published two Talmudic codices '*Aboda Sara*' and '*Tamid*' (1680). After some stay at Frankfurt, where he worked with that great master of Ethiopic, Ludolf, he finally betook himself to Amsterdam, where amid his studies of Jewish antiquities he had considerable intercourse with the Jews of that city. Upon his return to Upsala, he was appointed Professor of oriental languages at the University. In 1693 he was ennobled under the name of Lilienblad, and afterwards made Censor Librorum and Royal Librarian. In the year 1690 he was sent by Charles XI. to Lithuania and Poland to study the ceremonies, customs and writings of the Jewish sect of Karaites. His experiences and investigations during this journey are chronicled by himself in a letter to his friend Ludolf, and printed in Tentzel's '*Monatliche Unterredungen*,' 1691. (Epistola de Karraitis Lithuaniae ad J. Ludolphum.) Peringer also published a number of academic Disputations and 'Programs.' (See *Liden Catalogus Disputationum in Academiis et Gymnasiis Sueciæ*. Upsala, 1778-1780.) Of Peringer's stay in London there are no further details obtainable. It is probable that he also visited London upon his return journey between 1675 and 1680, and on that occasion wrote to Wagenseil from that city."

DAVID KAUFMANN.